

**Ben Cruse**  
**Appropriations Committee Hearing**  
**March 1, 2011**

Good evening, Chairwomen Harp and Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ben Cruse and I am the dean of students at Achievement First Hartford Academy, a Hartford public-charter school. I know most of you are familiar with Achievement First, but I wanted to talk with you briefly about our results on behalf of children in Connecticut.

Since opening in Hartford in 2006, Achievement First has been one of the top performing schools in the city. As our scholars prepare for their CMTs, I know that the commitment each of us has made to them, along with the support of their parents and their own hard work will result in continued positive outcomes.

Each of our scholars has a story that serves as a testament to his or her success. There are stories of scholars who come to us perhaps two or three years behind grade level. There are stories of scholars who have struggled with all the challenges of growing up in an urban environment. Yet, these are also stories of success, of young people who, surrounded by caring adults who know they can achieve have brought them up to and beyond their grade level. They are inspiring stories of children realizing their destinies are of their choosing, not their circumstances.

This is not easy work, and these results do not happen by accident. But each of us at Achievement First has made a promise to the parents who entrust their children to us. That promise is to give every scholar the absolute best education possible and to ensure they are successful in college and life. However, that promise is jeopardized each year that funding for Achievement First and other charter schools is not on par with other public schools. Connecticut's education funding system does not make sense, and even the Governor has acknowledged the need to fix it. In the meantime, flat funding still leaves us at a disadvantage, since we receive 75 cents on the dollar compared to traditional public schools.

At Achievement First, we teach our scholars REACH values – Respect, Enthusiasm, Achievement, Citizenship and Hard Work. We ask them to think critically and logically. This funding system is not logical and it does not respect our families. I realize the State is facing a budget deficit and that there are countless great

causes that must be considered as you try to close that fiscal gap. But we are striving to close a gap of our own, the achievement gap. Our scholars, our parents and our Achievement First team are committed to that, but expecting us to do more with less is not right. I ask you to consider that all children deserve a level playing field. And I ask you to show our scholars that they are worth funding fully.

Thank you for your time.